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ABSTRACT

Government statistics reveal nearly 2.5 million students leave schools yearly without adequate work preparation. Support for career education, as a renewal force, is needed to redirect educational emphasis from academic elitism to open access for occupational preparation. Vocational school graduates choose advanced education almost as often as their academic counterparts. As a primary administration aim, the United States Commissioner of Education advocates career education for all American children. Expansion of that position should provide career education to all regardless of age or social background; we are on the threshold of providing citizen's entitlement to occupational preparation. Career education is a systematic way to (1) acquaint elementary and middle school students with the work world, (2) prepare high school and college students to enter and advance in their chosen field, and (3) allow adults to re-enter formal education, upgrade skills, or enter new fields. To meet changing work needs, we must provide exposure and experience before job entry preparation and retraining opportunities. Perhaps career education should be offered first to students in school and then periodically after employment. Through paid educational leaves, workers in many countries (France, Russia, etc.) continue formal education, without age limit. (CSS)

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RENEWAL IN EDUCATION WITH EMPHASIS ON CAREERS

by

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It is probably common knowledge but a seldom pondered thought that there is no direct proviso in our almost 200 year old Constitution for the public educational system. However, from the time our forefathers settled this great land, education has been a recommended route to fulfillment in one's career and personal life.

Reform Needed

Historically, schools have zealously assumed the task of equipping people with the scholastic abilities to cope with life. Indeed, it is generally said that one submits to formal schooling to "get an education". But graduates of traditional high school and college programs are now asking, "What work was I prepared for?" Clearly, something in wrong. Government statistics show that nearly 2.5 million students leave schools each year without adequate preparation for a working life.

Preparation for meaningful employment and an economically secure future should be a goal of formal schooling. Students who approach commencement should find themselves ready with both the scholastic ability and job entry skills necessary to take their places in the work-a-day world. However, the truth is that many are moving from schools to the job market unprepared, unskilled and unemployable. Young people who

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have to face life without the necessary academic and technical abilities are handicapped. Worse yet, if allowed to continue through early adulthood, these handicaps could become lifelong disabilities.

An important point to remember is that great achievements and progress are usually made as a result of dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Our nation was founded on dissatisfaction--but action followed. Support for career education as a force to redirect educational emphasis from academic elitism, to open access for occupational preparation, is the type of action needed now.

Career Education Described

The concept of career education is really nothing new, but hopefully as it takes hold with the educational, industrial and business communities, it will promote the long needed concern for occupational preparation as a *prominent* goal of American education. One might ask, "What is career education?" Well, simply described, it is a comprehensive educational program focusing on careers, which begins in early childhood and continues through the adult years. It is a people-oriented concept which is responsive to the demand for both relevance and accountability. It is not an "add-on" to the school curriculum, but an infusion and a lifelong systematic attempt to facilitate rational career planning and preparation. Career education seeks to ready students for an economically secure and satisfying future in the world of work. It is based on the premise that all honest and purposeful work is respectable.

An Education for Everyone

The United States Commissioner of Education has, in fact, identified the extension of career education to *all American children* as one of the primary aims of his administration. An expansion of that position should provide that career education be available to *all students*, from *all social backgrounds*, at *all ages*. The late Whitney M. Young wrote:

> "Our goal must be to...create an Open Society--a society in which each human being can flourish and develop to the maximum of his God-given potential; a society in which ethnic and cultural differences are not stifled for monotonous conformity; a pluralistic society, alive, creative, open to the marvel of self-discovery."

Agreed, much needs to be done to make preparation for an occupation more appealing to students. Many must be convinced that career training and development is a first-rate educational experience for all, rather than a second-rate education for second-rate people. Historical and cultural prejudices against "non-humanistic" education on the part of many parents, teachers, and students have no place in a world that is technologically oriented.

One of the many societal difficulties yet to be overcome is the implication that students who choose or are counseled into established occupational-oriented programs, such as Industrial Arts, Home Economics, and the range of Vocational offerings, are underachievers or discipline problems. Further, the myth that enrollment in such programs rules out a college education is damaging, especially in this enlightened era of open admissions policies when vocational school graduates are opting for advanced education almost as often as their academic counterparts.[1]

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[1]Beatrice G. Reubens, "Vocational Education: Performance and Potential," Manpower, 6:27, July, 1974.

It is interesting and useful to note how the French educational system has met the technological demands of modern society in the context of their humanistic heritage. To increase the prestige of career education and to interest students in technical and vocational education, the government of France enacted national legislation. The law requires each school to offer its students guidance and counseling services and provide them with up-to-date information about the nature of jobs and the training programs that are available in the schools.[2] This is in contrast to American efforts to stimulate interest in career education through persuasion.

Now that we are on the threshold of providing for a citizens entitlement to occupational preparation, and there are more than 20,000 possible careers from which to choose, students of all ages have a unique opportunity to shape their own destiny. This means that our schools and colleges have an unprecedented obligation to combine academic and occupational programs in prestigeful ways that make every student's career choice not only possible, but attainable and self-satisfying.

A Continuing Process

Career education is a systematic way to acquaint students with the world of work in the elementary and middle school years and to prepare

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[2]Raymond E. Wanner, A French Approach to Career Education. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Publication (OE) 73-19100, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), page 3.

them in high school and college to enter and advance in a carefully chosen career field. For adults it is a way to re-enter formal education, to update and/or upgrade skills in an established career field. Or, to enter new fields, perhaps even ones which did not exist when they were first employed.

In the primary grades career education means that the traditional academic program is expanded to familiarize youngsters with the many fields of endeavor open to them. In the middle grades, students are encouraged to explore, in some depth, broad career clusters. By senior high, each student should be in a position to make a tentative career selection and begin appropriate training.

However, to rush students into a career decision at too early an age is unrealistic and unfair. The concept of education continuing throughout life offers far greater possibilities for attaining competence and satisfaction than does the traditional system with its fateful finality of early choice. To separate students into career tracks on the basis of standardized test scores, academic achievement or the judgment of specialists also remains somewhat questionable. Such decisions are, however, often forced on young people for social and other reasons, in many cases as early as the ninth grade, while more favored students postpone their occupational selection through college or even graduate school. If, indeed, the aim of career education is to open up new options for students, we must insure opportunities for exposure and experience before preparing for job entry and thereafter provide for regular possibilities for retraining and adaptation to changing work and job needs.

Perhaps career education should be offered in two phases. The first while a student is in school, the second over a periodic basis after initial employment. This may be even more realistic if one considers that as the rate of technological advancement increases, jobs will come into and go out of existence even faster.

International Perspective

An interesting provision of the French legislation mentioned earlier provides for workers to attend approved continuing education programs all during their active life. Workers have the right, upon formal request, to time off, which can extend up to one year. This is "company time"; that is to say, it is considered as time on the job. The employee continues, during the period of training, to receive salary and build up vacation, seniority, and fringe benefits. Government and industry share in the costs of this expanded educational opportunity which is available to most workers after two years on the job.[3]

The worker's sabbatical is intended not only to assure an initial minimum of occupational preparation for the young, but also to provide throughout one's career realistic possibilities for continuing professional education and personal growth. Through paid educational leaves, workers in France, Luxembourg, Russia, and the state of Hamburg in the Federal Republic of Germany, are now able to continue formal education, without age limit. This illustrates that education truly oriented toward a career may be pursued on a regular basis throughout that career.

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[3] Ibid., p. 10.

A Force for Renewal

One consequence of our heritage is the belief that every person, regardless of race, creed, sex, or age, has an inalienable right to an economically secure future in the world of work. Career education is a force for renewal in American education to meet this belief. It is people-oriented with lifelong educational opportunities *for all*.

This re-direction in public education will facilitate career planning and preparation for meaningful employment. Thereafter, opportunities to resume schooling, throughout life, to meet changing job requirements or for personal enrichment will provide better assurance of a satisfying and happier life in the world of work.

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